

Integrating Special Operations Forces Operational Design and Joint Doctrine

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Integrating Special Operations Forces Operational Design and Joint Doctrine, by MAJ Mark T. Newdigate, 46 pages.

This monograph conducts a comparative analysis of current operational design doctrine and recent publications that reflect an evolution of operational design unique to special operations. The focus is on the relevance of a unique operational design methodology for use in special operations. The study finds that the creation of an operational design methodology unique to Special Operations Forces (SOF) complicates efforts to conduct joint and combined integrated planning. In particular, the *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design* offers an alternative approach to operational design, but does not represent an evolution specific to special operations. Future developments of a USASOC planner's handbook on operational design should nest with the methodology and concepts found in Joint and Army doctrine. The implementation of a SOF Operational Design methodology unique to special operations and differing from current Army and Joint doctrine does not support the unity of effort needed for total force integration. However, the Army should recognize the value in the recent efforts on SOF Operational Design and consider the applicability of design considerations related to limited war and shaping operations in future revisions of design doctrine while maintaining utility throughout Unified Land Operations.

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Acronyms

ADM	Army Design Methodology
CF	Conventional Forces
DOD	Department of Defense
FOE	Future Operational Environment
GCC	Geographic Combatant Command
GSN	Global SOF Network
JIIM	Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational
MDMP	Military Decision Making Process
SH	Stakeholder
SOC	Special Operations Command
SOD	Systemic Operational Design
SOF	Special Operations Forces
USASOC	United State Army Special Operations Command
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command

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Introduction

It is well known that when you do anything, unless you understand its actual circumstances, its nature and its relations to other things, you will not know the laws governing it, or know how to do it, or be able to do it well.

— Mao Tse-Tung, “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War”

Following nearly a decade and a half of large-scale deployments in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States is changing the way it employs the military element of national power. Current fiscal constraints and waning political support for high-profile protracted operations by conventional forces (CF) are causing military leaders to pursue strategic objectives through the employment of small-scale distributed operations. The reduction in acceptable deployed force ratios necessitates an increased dependency on partner nation support and indigenous sustainment mechanisms. Critical to the success of operations will be the relationships, trust, and cultural adaptability built through persistent engagement with partner forces.

The implication of this approach to national security is that operational planners will need to focus more on the Shape and Deter phases of operations as opposed to the Seize the Initiative and Dominate phases.¹ Furthermore, major operations or campaign plans may be specifically designed having no expectation of operations beyond Phase Zero, Shape. Warfare that focuses on influencing others through indirect means and striking the enemy by using strategically-enabled partner forces may call for a change in the approach to operational design.

Fortunately for the Army, the special operations community, which specializes in operations short of war, is taking the initiative to adapt operational planning to the future

¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011), fig. III-17. Phasing Model, provides a general template for campaigns and operations. The phases are Shape (Phase 0), Deter (Phase 1), Seize Initiative (Phase II), Dominate (Phase III), Stabilize (Phase IV), Enable Civil Authority (Phase V).

operational environment (FOE). Unfortunately, the creation of an operational design methodology unique to Special Operations Forces (SOF) complicates efforts to conduct joint and combined integrated planning. The United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) publication, *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design* attempts to close the doctrinal gap on design between expeditionary warfare and strategic engagement. The intent of this study is to research SOF Operational Design and conduct a comparative analysis with current Joint doctrine that takes into account recent SOF particular design discussions.

The ongoing analysis of operational design by the special operations community is informative and relevant to the FOE. However, the implementation of a SOF Operational Design methodology unique to special operations and differing from current Army and Joint doctrine does not support the unity of effort needed for total force integration. Differing methodologies found within SOF units will frustrate SOF operational planners taught the Joint doctrinal approach to operational design and SOF planners applying non-doctrinal methodologies will frustrate Joint Force commanders. On the other hand, the Army should recognize the value in the recent efforts on SOF Operational Design and should consider the applicability of design considerations related to limited war and shaping operations in future revisions of design doctrine while maintaining utility throughout Unified Land Operations.

Research Question

The scope of this research centers on the analysis of Joint Operational Design and the Army Design Methodology (ADM) when compared to recent non-doctrinal publications related to SOF Operational Art and Design. The establishment of operational design elements that combine, modify, or introduce terminology into the design lexicon require examination in order to validate their utility across the Joint Force. Examinations of these elements will provide commanders a clearer understanding of the process and improve application of these methods.

Does the establishment of SOF Operational Design represent a unique methodology to operational planning or is it more a functional expression of how SOF planners cognitively implement the Joint elements of operational design? How do current non-doctrinal publications on SOF Operational Design compare to current doctrine?

Research Methodology

This study conducts a comparative analysis of current operational design doctrine and recent publications that reflect an evolution of operational design unique to SOF. The focus is on the relevancy of a unique operational design methodology for use in special operations. The working hypothesis is that the published debate on SOF Operational Design represents the application and expression of principles rather than a requirement for unique doctrine that describes a separate operational environment, unique terminology, and procedural flow.

Beginning with a review of current national security, Department of Defense (DOD), and Department of the Army policies, directives, and key leader official statements, the study will show that there remains a consistent message toward limited war and partner-nation capacity building. This will establish the foundation for a critical assessment of the utility of current elements of operational design.

An examination of literature surrounding the current operational design methodology will establish an understanding of its rationale and intended purpose. Additionally, the review of recent debates on operational design may recommend revisions to future Joint Operational Design doctrine. Most of the operational level planning considerations by SOF are likely applicable across the Joint Force.

The elements of Joint Operational Design, as prescribed by Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, are evaluated using historical and conceptual theories relevant to limited war

or “war’s second grammar.”² A comparison of USASOC’s elements of SOF Operational Design to these same conceptual theories will provide contextual support to an evolution of thought. Juxtaposing these elements of operational design with other SOF Operational Design literature provides an objective assessment. A final summary discussion of the current dialogue on SOF Operational Design provides recommendations for integration of SOF Operational Design into Army and Joint doctrine.

This research contributes to the debate on operational design and gives credence to the analysis done by others in the SOF community. Planners within the SOF community will recognize the interest taken by United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and USASOC in developing a cadre of planners who fully understand operational art and campaign design. Those who understand the design principles are more likely to integrate them in all planning phases.

Doctrine writers should also find this research helpful in establishing a value judgment on differing design terminology or methodologies. This monograph provides analysis of recent works related to SOF Operational Design and offers suggestions to incorporating valuable insights into future development of military planning references.

Based on recent national strategy documents, senior leader vision statements, and resource allocations, it is likely that SOF planners and Special Operations Joint Task Forces will be central to the design of regional campaign plans focused on long-term engagement. Protracted military engagement strategies have been a core competency primarily left to the advisory role of SOF. Counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, stability, and reconstruction operations are all contemporary realities that will likely place the Joint Force in a supporting role

² Antulio Echevarria II, “American Operational Art, 1917-2008,” in *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, eds. John Andreas Olsen and Martin van Creveld (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 137.

and require full integration and synchronization with other agencies. As US military forces continue to integrate more and more stakeholders into military campaigns, refinements to doctrine are projected and encouraged.

The design of future theater campaign plans will likely emphasize regional strategies that focus on support of Phase Zero Shaping efforts. Operations will likely be limited in scale, objectives, and resources. Planners must be adaptable in their use of Joint doctrine and be comfortable with broad definitions that allow for flexibility in the design process.

Understanding the Debate on Operational Design

Established joint processes such as Operational Design and joint operation planning provide a fundamentally sound problem-solving approach. However, staffs have been seen too often apply these processes mechanistically, as if progressing through a sequence of planning steps would produce a solution. “Over-proceduralization” inhibits the commander’s and staff’s critical thinking and creativity, which are essential to finding a timely solution to complex problems . . . the focus on procedural steps and details has tended to obscure the importance of the underlying creative process, a process that focuses early on problem-setting vice problem-solving.

— General James Mattis, “Vision for a Joint Approach to Operational Design”

Debate and criticism of doctrinal methods and academic theories are common within the military profession. Current and former practitioners of military art and science regularly seek to apply lessons learned and evolve processes to achieve operational success more effectively. Ambiguous political and strategic guidance challenges planners to develop broad narratives and operational approaches that are flexible and offer a range of military options rather than commit national leaders to a strategic direction that may become politically unsustainable.

Design thinking, developed in military planning as a way to deal with unclear situations, uses a systems thinking approach to analysis and understanding in order to reduce complexity.³

³ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2010), 73.

Complexity is inherent in any problem involving the behavior of people.⁴ Complexity is not a revelation in challenges to military operations, but becomes more pronounced given the lack of a cohesive grand strategy, dynamic geopolitics, and dysfunctional interagency relationships.⁵ The weakness of non-military elements of national power results from comparatively marginal resourcing. The intervention of CF into foreign policy actions once carried out by Special Forces or funded through inter-agency and non-government organizations greatly increases complexity and potential risks.⁶

Design is most applicable to ill-structured problems where there are no generally agreed upon solutions and the right answer may exist within a range of options.⁷ Labeling problems as ill structured, or wicked, is popular among military planners today, however all problems that involve a human adversary will be complex and require conceptual thought. The degree of problem understanding, or rather misunderstanding, defines a problem as wicked or ill structured. Design, as a conceptual planning tool, is not intended to provide an actionable plan but a broad direction and greater understanding of the problem, with purposeful action in mind, so that a better-detailed execution plan is produced.⁸

⁴ Colonel Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., US Army, Dr. Scott Gorman, Colonel Jack Marr, US Army, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph McLamb, US Army, Dr. Michael Stewart, and Dr. Pete Schifferle, "Integrated Planning: The Operations Process, Design, and the Military Decision Making Process," *Military Review* (January-February 2011): 29, accessed 4 March 2014, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/grigsby_janfeb2011.pdf.

⁵ Adam Elkus and Crispin Burke, "Operational Design: Promise and Problems," *Small Wars Journal* (2010): 5, accessed 26 February 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/362-elkus.pdf>.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁸ Grigsby et al., 31.

The criticism of design within the military profession makes it important to understand its development and evolution. Both the Army and Joint communities have adopted design methodologies in planning.⁹ In the US Army, design evolved from Israeli Brigadier General (Retired) Shimon Naveh's concept of Systemic Operational Design (SOD). The US Army School of Advanced Military Studies is associated with the contemporary development and institutional education of what, today, is termed operational design. The US Army School of Advanced Military Studies defines design as, "learning about an unfamiliar problem and [exploiting] that understanding to create a broad approach to problem solving."¹⁰ Naveh applied systems theory, Soviet operational art, French philosophy, social sciences, psychology, architecture and urban planning, and even ancient Chinese military thinking in the development of SOD.¹¹

Part of the challenge in using Israeli SOD as a methodology is in the perception of academic exclusivity that surrounds it and in the difficulty of translating application to the tactical level. Naveh himself proclaimed, SOD is "not easy to understand . . . because [it is] not intended for ordinary mortals."¹² Despite the challenges with SOD and other systems approaches, such as Effects Based Approach to Operations, many believe that the world consists of complex adaptive

⁹ Adam Elkus, "A Critical Perspective on Operational Art and Design Theory," *Small Wars Journal* (30 April 2012): 1-7, accessed 26 February 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/print/12566>.

¹⁰ Department of the Army, US Army Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet (TRADOC Pam) 525-5-500, *Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design*, version 1.0 (Fort Monroe, VA: Headquarters, US Army Training and Doctrine Command, 28 January 2008), 13.

¹¹ Milan N. Vego, "A Case Against Systemic Operational Design," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 53 (2nd Quarter 2009): 71, accessed 4 March 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA515328>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 73.

systems that linear military processes are not effective at addressing.¹³ Planners who fail to develop an understanding of design early in their careers are unlikely to appreciate its usefulness in the future.

Operational design is not just applicable at the operational level and above; the name offers no relation to a particular level of warfare. The ADM is one of three integrated planning methodologies applicable at any organizational level. The design approach in military planning is only as good as its ability to inform the more detailed processes.¹⁴ The design-like thinking that informs operational design is a conceptual thought process and series of tools to gain understanding. Military planners, not given the tools for conceptual planning, are more likely to rely on familiar detailed planning processes, and neglect the integration between conceptual and detailed planning. In order to ensure planners effectively employ design doctrine, it must be clear, concise, and consistent across services and functions. Naval War College professor Milan Vego fittingly suggests that doctrine of the same subject matter should use the same lexicon to avoid misinterpretations and confusion during operations.¹⁵

The operational design process, whether applying the Joint or Army approach, is integral to other decision-making processes.¹⁶ Effective planning must be both conceptual and detailed in its processes, and design is a tool for conceptual thinking.¹⁷ Although other planning constructs contain conceptual elements, the ADM is a broadly accepted methodology and is mostly

¹³ Vego, 73.

¹⁴ Grigsby et al., 34.

¹⁵ Vego, 75.

¹⁶ Ibid., 74.

¹⁷ Grigsby et al., 28-29.

congruent across the Joint community.¹⁸ “The design methodology provides a means of approximating complex problems that allows for meaningful action.”¹⁹ As a conceptual framework, design helps commanders understand, visualize, and describe situations, enabling them to provide effective intent and guidance.²⁰

Joint Operational Design supports the application of operational art and offers commanders the cognitive space to conceptualize thought, while not being constrained by a linear process. Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* describes operational art as, the “application of creative imagination by commanders and staffs – supported by their skill, knowledge, and experience – to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces.”²¹ Former US Army School of Advanced Military Studies Director, Major General Wayne Grigsby, Jr. stated, the “design methodology is intentionally less structured than our other planning methodologies. The design methodology asks commanders to increase the elasticity of their own minds by considering input from sources that would be of questionable usefulness if the situation were more familiar.”²²

Operational design used to develop a campaign or major operation must take in account the full range of military and nonmilitary variables. Even when the military finds itself in a supporting role, early and prudent planning can ensure the integration of stakeholders in time,

¹⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹ Grigsby et al., 30.

²⁰ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 6-6.

²¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 11 August 2011), I-13.

²² Grigsby et al., 31.

space, and purpose to achieve a common interest.²³ Because the operational approach forms a framework for the execution of policy and strategy, operational design must seek to integrate with other elements of national power and account for competing interests among stakeholders. The Joint Operating Environment creates challenges that demand unity of effort. To achieve unity of effort commanders must design operations that gain participation and buy-in by intergovernmental and multinational partners. Since the Army's development of operational design, and its integration into Joint doctrine, the Army has evolved its doctrine to be less dissimilar.

The special operations community is developing the capacity to conduct campaigning by designing long-term operational approaches that focus on persistent engagement. These types of campaigns would potentially find SOF leaders in charge of a Joint Task Force integrating a whole-of-government approach in support of the Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) Theater Campaign Plan. Whether seen as war or as strategic engagement, these campaigns may require different terminology or a "second grammar."²⁴ Military scholar Antulio Echevarria II makes the case for such a grammar, which occurs in conflict outside of total war, where approaches center on limited objectives.²⁵ The special operations community may find that indeed there is a unique grammar found within the way low-intensity or strategic engagement campaigns are executed. However, it is important to recognize, as military theorist Carl von Clausewitz did, that regardless of grammar, the logic or ends are the same.²⁶ Terminology and

²³ General John N. Mattis, US Marine Corps, "Memorandum to US Joint Forces Command: Vision for a Joint Approach to Operational Design," 6 October 2009, accessed 4 March 4, 2014, http://www.jfcom.mil/newslink/storyarchive/2009/aod_2009.pdf, 2.

²⁴ Echevarria, "American Operational Art, 1917-2008, 137.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 605.

doctrine will continue to evolve, but before change occurs, there must be a more concrete understanding of established doctrine.

Revisions to the *USASOC Planner's Handbook to SOF Operational Design* should be congruent with Joint and Army doctrine, while providing unique considerations or expressions in designing a SOF operational approach and integration with the detailed planning processes. As a non-doctrinal handbook, it stimulates research and collaboration and helps the SOF community understand and debate design-related issues in time to inform campaign development. The complex world requires all planners and commanders to have increased capacity to conduct creative and critical thinking. Design-like thinking and general systems theory inform military thinking in terms of framing specific situations with unique context in mind, rather than attempting to fight the last battle.²⁷

Joint doctrine, applicable to all services, must remain generally broad in order to allow commanders flexibility of thought rather than tying them to a particular process or model to solve complex problems.²⁸ Doctrine provides constructs such as the Joint Operation Phasing Model (figure 1) or lines of effort and lines of operation used to illustrate an operational approach as examples; these are not prescriptive.²⁹ The FOE may present situations that are not suited for the examples offered in doctrine.³⁰ Yet, planners too often default to these models and the very essence of creativity in the concept of design is lost.

²⁷ Mattis, 1.

²⁸ Ibid., 7.

²⁹ Ibid., 5.

³⁰ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, version 1.9 (Fort Bragg, NC: US Army Special Operations Command, 27 August 2013), IV-3.

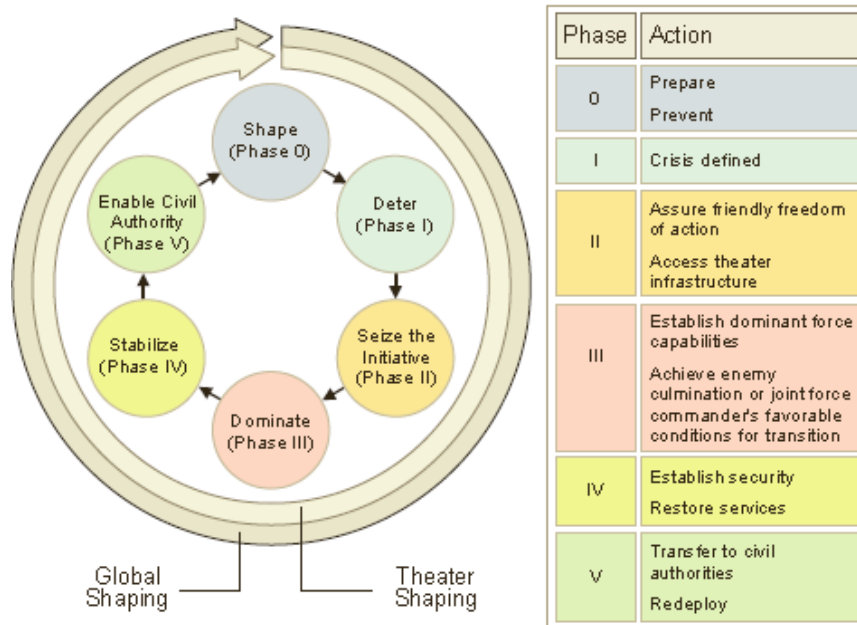


Figure 1. Joint Operation Phasing Model.

Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011), III-41.

Before an evolution of current doctrine is considered, we must first develop a more complete foundational understanding of design through education. The value that SOF Operational Design offers in a modified approach to conceptual planning is the emphasis on contextual understanding and stakeholder integration. These are important aspects in understanding the operational environment and current doctrine implies them conceptually. Paradoxically, as we pursue education initiatives on design, students will inherently be encouraged to develop unique ideas of understanding. These ideas should not necessarily become a catalyst for doctrine revision, as doctrine should allow for conceptual creativity in application. SOF Operational Design is an example of conceptual creativity.

Understanding Current Design Doctrine

Special Operations Command (SOC) headquarters are joint organizations that must be adept at the planning and execution methodologies of all DOD services. Planning occurs along a spectrum from conceptual to detailed, but the operational level planning at a SOC should be mostly conceptual, allowing subordinate SOF units the greatest amount of flexibility to plan and execute detailed operations. Although SOF units are capable of operating from air, land, and sea, the supporting objectives sought within all operational domains are most often directed at policy directives and goals found on land. Employing current doctrine on Joint Operational Design and ADM will allow the SOC commander and planners to develop broad conceptual plans that provide sufficient articulation of operational design relevant to SOF units and their partners.

Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 5-0, *The Operations Process*, and the *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design* are three resources of contemporary operational design for planners. The *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design* is a relevant and contemporary approach to operational design purposefully written for the SOF community. Friction occurs in the presentation of a modified set of Elements of Operational Design and an adapted methodology or design flow. This USASOC handbook provides a contextual perspective of operational design considerations relevant to Army Special Operations Forces, but fails to justify any deviation from Joint and Army doctrine.

The basis for operational design is the conceptual and creative development of ideas for solving ill-structured problems in complex environments. Grounded in theory and history, operational design evolves from Naveh's Systemic Operational Design through redevelopment and implementation by the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies.³¹ The ADM was

³¹ Department of the Army, TRADOC Pam 525-5-500, 13.

adapted into Joint doctrine as Joint Operational Design and uses systems thinking, such as that described by Peter Senge's *Fifth Discipline*, to understand, visualize, and describe the interactions within complex adaptive systems.³²

Army Doctrinal Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* states that, "Army design methodology is a methodology for applying critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe problems and approaches to solving them."³³ The Joint Force brought design into Joint doctrine, slightly modifying ADM, but using congruent language, as Joint Operational Design. Both are concerned with the operational environment, problem, and operational approach. Although Joint Operational Design begins with an understanding of strategic guidance, the outputs of both include the operational approach, commander's initial planning guidance, description of the operational environment, definition of the problem, and commander's initial intent. These outputs serve as the starting point for detailed planning associated with the Joint Operational Planning Process or the Army Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). In terms of other land-based approaches, the Marine Corps Planning Process is a hybrid that includes elements of MDMP and the Joint Operational Planning Process. As Joint Operational Design and ADM evolve, they continue to complement each other.

Although having service specific planning processes may seem confusing in a Joint environment, the inputs, considerations, and outputs are essentially the same. The difference is in the more explicit articulation of considerations and key concepts that particular services wish to emphasize. With the Joint Operational Design process as a foundation, ADM provides a more nuanced emphasis needed by land forces to develop contextually relevant, stakeholder supported,

³² Senge, 267. Systems thinking as described Senge is a mind set to seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-and-effect chains and seeing processes of change rather than snap shots.

³³ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-4.

and visually understandable operational approaches that develop into detailed plans. The potential value for SOF Operational Design lies in the articulation of functional specific considerations from which SOF operational planners would benefit. The articulation of SOF specific expressions relevant to operations short of war may also be relevant across the Joint Force and integrated into existing doctrine.

Joint doctrine on operational design emphasizes understanding strategic guidance, understanding the operational environment, and defining the problem, whereas ADM emphasizes framing, narrative construction, and visual modeling. The sequence of ADM (figure 2) is: (1) frame an operational environment; (2) frame the problem; (3) develop an operational approach; and (4) develop the plan.³⁴ Within each of these steps framing, narrative construction, and visual modeling help to understand, visualize, and describe a solution to the problem.

³⁴ Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 5-0, 2-6.

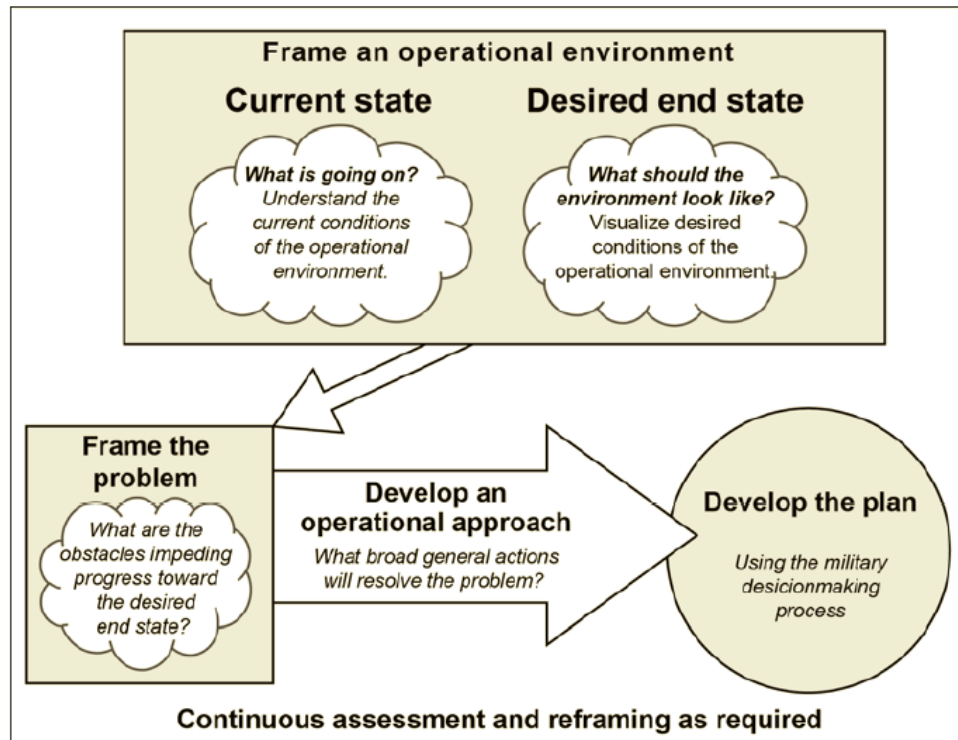


Figure 2. Army Design Methodology.

Source: Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-6.

Framing is the central idea to understanding the operational environment and developing a perspective for action. Ultimately, the design process develops an operational approach to solving a problem, implying purposeful action. Developing an understanding of the operational environment goes beyond simply establishing the current conditions, desired conditions, and obstacles in between. Framing problems using systems analysis visually and contextually describes the relationships between actors within the environment and associated variables. Joint Operational Design includes an analysis of the operational variables (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure); however, it does not emphasize the importance of relationships between these variables. Whether framing the operational environment or the problem, framing in ADM encourages two other key concepts,

critical/creative thinking, and collaboration/dialogue.³⁵ These concepts equate to allowing discourse to occur between commander, planning teams, and other stakeholders to support a common narrative and unity of effort.

Narrative construction is important in the design process because this is how the products will communicate to other audiences.³⁶ Just as a course of action sketch eventually requires a written order, the products of design must have a narrative that accompanies them. Narratives allow for stand-alone products and articulate meaning, context, events, and symbols.

The visual modeling associated with ADM is the most recognizable attribute of the design process. Visual models are mentally stimulating and often foster dialogue among stakeholders. Although helpful with illustrating the complexity of challenging problem sets, the greatest value in visual models is the discourse that leads to increased shared understanding and creative thought. Visual models can illuminate relationships between variables and demonstrate a depth of understanding.³⁷

SOF often operates and thrives in periods of crisis, which places significant time constraints on planning. Ideally, execution of ADM occurs prior to, and continues through MDMP; but, valuable increases in understanding through design are possible at all stages of planning and execution.³⁸ SOF conducting surgical strike operations should use the ADM process to develop a target's associated relationships and anticipate how a complex environment may react based on direct action within a system.

³⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 5-0, 2-5.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 5-0, 2-5.

³⁸ Ibid., 2-13.

In an environment characterized by waning political support and fiscal constraints on large-scale military action in support of foreign political and policy objectives, SOC elements are uniquely capable of conducting special warfare activities characterized by long-duration, small-footprint, and indirect approaches. The design process has proven to be useful to the special operations community in historical instances of long-duration special warfare campaigns. For more than a decade, Special Operations Command South has provided military efforts in support of US foreign policy objectives in Columbia. As a whole-of-government approach, Plan Columbia serves as a testimony to host nation and inter-agency cooperation that continues to learn, anticipate, and adapt to ever-changing conditions in the complex environments in and around South America. The Army's contribution to Plan Columbia has been ARSOF elements particularly from 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Through the design process, Special Operations Command South provides broad guidance that allows ARSOF detachments the flexibility to support US and Colombian desired conditions.

Framing the operational environment and problem within any country requires thorough study, and Columbia is no exception. Over the years, the problem frame in Columbia has changed dramatically, from training para-military groups to counter left-wing guerrillas, to focusing efforts on counter-narcotics production and trafficking, to the establishment and support of a Colombian Joint Special Operations Command. By using ADM, the SF Group headquarters has increased the commander's understanding of the changing environment and made recommendations that have ultimately influenced the design process of the SOC headquarters and even national policy.

Although SOF primarily focus on developing relationships and enhancing indigenous tactical level combat and detailed planning skills, the ADM offers a construct that can provide partner forces with an operational level planning ability. Integrating conceptual planning tools, such as ADM, into the training of partner forces can assist them to contextually understand their

own complex environment, increase understanding for US SOF, and focus development of plans on broad conceptual frameworks that allow subordinate forces to plan and execute within their means. Indigenous forces unable to execute detailed plans that rely on the synchronization of time, space, and resources often frustrate SOF. Using ADM in concert with MDMP and Troop Leading Procedures provides an integrated planning framework that reaches from the operational to the tactical level. Partner forces utilizing ADM can see relationships within their environment and anticipate how direct and indirect actions may affect their system. The integration of conceptual planning by partner forces will focus efforts on the plan to achieve operational and strategic goals and create the space for indigenous methods of execution to be effective.

The implementation of current Joint Operational Design and ADM can provide the tools for units to develop broad conceptual plans that reflect a holistic understanding of the operational environment, problem set, and provide an operational approach that stakeholders support. Joint doctrine provides a foundational understanding of operational design, and ADM delivers a more nuanced understanding that focuses on purposeful action and articulates considerations relevant to unique functional expressions; however, any handbook that departs from foundational doctrine loses utility in the community at large.

Analysis of Special Operations Forces Operational Design

The *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design* creates a separation between SOF and CF planning integration by changing the elements of operational design from currently established elements in Joint and Army doctrine. The USASOC Commanding General approved the handbook under analysis here for release on 27 August 2013. The handbook states, "SOF Operational Design is not a new or independent concept. Rather . . . Operational Design,

evolved.”³⁹ To evolve is “to change or develop slowly often into a better, more complex, or more advanced state.”⁴⁰ Has SOF Operational Design evolved into a better, more complex, more advanced methodology? Does the operational environment described in this handbook illustrate an environment unique to special operations? The answer must be in the affirmative if we are to justify a unique methodology or deviation from Joint and Army doctrine.

The handbook states that it is “informed by Joint Vision 2020, USSOCOM 2020 Strategy, ARSOF 2022, and the CSA’s Marching Orders,” and “include[s] a unique set of elements and distinct flow . . . to support . . . special warfare solutions . . . [in] the FOE.”⁴¹ The FOE described in these documents echoes the *National Security Strategy*, the *Defense Strategic Guidance*, and the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*. It is clear that the anticipated environment of the future is not specific to special operations. Rather, this is an environment where actions taken abroad by the United States will be fiscally constrained and require the full integration of national power in order to minimize the perceived militarization of foreign policy.

The global agility and institutional planning processes that the DOD uses to respond to crises often result in military personnel at the leading edge of policy, whether as the supported effort or in support of other government agencies. The integration of different departments and agencies is a consistent theme throughout the aforementioned strategic visions. *The U.S. Army Capstone Concept* states, the “Army must achieve SOF and conventional force

³⁹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner’s Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, I-1.

⁴⁰ Merriam-Webster, “Evolve,” accessed 7 June 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/evolve>.

⁴¹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner’s Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, I-1.

interdependence.”⁴² SOF and CF interdependence is defined in *The U.S. Army Capstone Concept* as the “deliberate and mutual reliance by one force on another’s inherent capabilities designed to provide complementary and reinforcing effects.”⁴³

The integration of SOF/CF/JIIM (joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational) and partner capabilities begins with a convergence of doctrinal approaches that synchronize the methodologies used to arrive at decisions for action. This is not to say that all personnel should be educated the same or be expected to conform to a prescriptive style of thought. On the contrary, one of the greatest advantages to operating in a JIIM environment is the diversity of backgrounds and thought of the participants. When developing an operational campaign, these diverse experiences and ideas applied in an integrated system can effectively communicate concepts across the widest array of audiences.

The handbook states, the “current design methodologies produce suboptimal results . . . [and that] a new planning framework is required for the FOE.” SOF Operational Design maintains several of the current doctrinal elements, but introduces others (culture, problem characterization, stakeholder development, operational time, SOF/CF/JIIM/SH [Stakeholder] approach, collaboration model) as “essential for planning but unlikely to be considered unless explicitly stated.”⁴⁴ This seems somewhat disparaging to a SOF planner’s ability to understand and apply Joint Operational Design and ADM doctrine. The value in this handbook, apart from

⁴² Department of the Army, US Army Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-3-0, *The U.S. Army Capstone Concept* (Fort Monroe, VA: Headquarters, US Army Training and Doctrine Command, 19 December 2012), 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁴ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner’s Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, I-4.

doctrine, may be in the explicit articulation of considerations relevant to a particular audience; however, the need for a unique structure is not clear.

The definition of SOF Operational Design is “a planning model, anchored with contemporary design elements that frames the development and execution of a SOF campaign and major operations in support of the military end state in a SOF Operational Environment.”⁴⁵ By juxtaposing Joint Operational Design with SOF Operational Design, it is apparent this methodology is not unique, but simply a differing approach in the expression of application. This differing approach does not represent an evolution or optimization in the execution of operational design. Rather, it convolutes the process by providing an alternative to reaching the same ends.

A critical analysis of SOF Operational Design must examine the differences from the Joint Elements of Operational Design. The *USASOC Planner’s Handbook for SOF Operational Design* introduces several unique design elements and then modifies the name or combines names of elements taken from the Joint Elements of Operational Design. It is important to understand that elements of operational design are conceptual tools used to understand the environment, define the problem, and develop an operational approach (figure 3).

⁴⁵ Ibid., V-9.

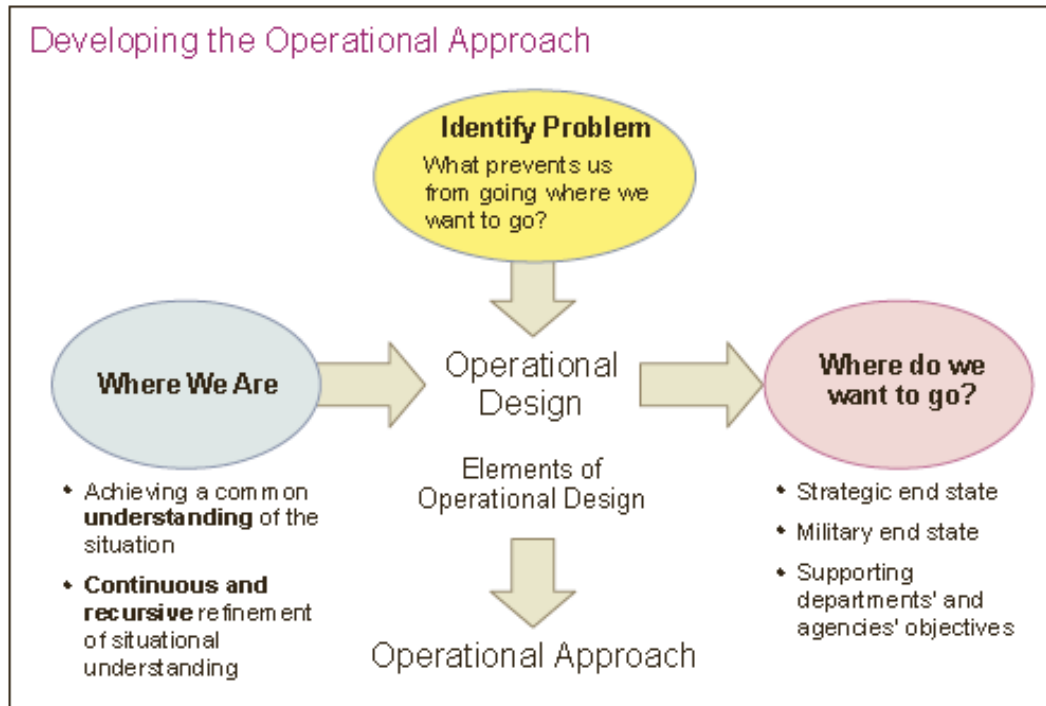


Figure 3. Developing the Operational Approach.

Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011), III-3.

As tools, each may have varying degrees of applicability to different types or scales of conflict.⁴⁶ The process of operational design and the supporting elements allow for interpretive uses and although we should remain open to the introduction of new cognitive tools, innovations should be more than semantics or minor alterations of methodologies.

⁴⁶ JCS, JP 5-0, III-18.

Table 1. Operational Design Elements Comparison.

JOINT OPERATIONAL DESIGN	SOF OPERATIONAL DESIGN
Termination	*Termination Criteria
Military End State	*Nesting End States - National Strategic, Interagency, Military, Partners
Culmination	*Culmination
Objective	*Objective/LOO and LOE
Line of Operation	
Line of Effort	
Center of Gravity	*Center of Gravity/Decisive Point
Decisive Point	
Direct and Indirect Approach	SOF/CF/JIIM/SH Approach
Forces and Functions	Collaboration Model
Operational Reach	Stakeholder (SH) Development
Arranging Operations	Operational Time
Anticipation	Culture
Effect	Problem Characterization

Source: Headquarters, Department of the Army. *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, version 1.9 (Fort Bragg, NC: US Army Special Operations Command, 27 August 2013), V-4.

The design element of culture is new in terms of its explicit listing as an element of design. Culture is a much generalized and often overused anthropological word that can exhaust efforts in describing the operational environment. A common understanding of culture is the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time or a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz states, “Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experiences and guide their actions.”⁴⁷ Culture is part of the operational environment frame, as explicitly mentioned in ADM. “Members of the planning team capture their work in an operational

⁴⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 145.

environment frame (using narrative and visual models) that describes and depicts the history, culture, current state, relationships, and future goals of relevant actors in an operational environment.”⁴⁸ In the Joint Operational Design process, the examination of culture happens through the step of Understand the Operational Environment and appears in the form of analysis of the operational variables (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure). The Joint Operational Design process in Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* references and directs the planner’s analysis to Joint Publication 2-01.3, *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* for developing further understanding of the complexities and system variables within environments.⁴⁹ SOF Operational Design expresses culture as a planning factor and details several anthropological traits. The contemporary cultural analysis such as social media mapping, digital collection, and online sentiment analysis is valuable to the entire Joint community and future doctrine should integrate these ideas.⁵⁰ The consideration of culture as a planning factor is not unique to SOF; Joint and Army doctrine effectively account for it within the established operational environment frame.

Problem Characterization as a planning factor in SOF Operational Design, rather than as a separate step within the methodology, is a significant departure from Joint and Army doctrine. Define the Problem is the third step in Joint Operational Design and it is clearly articulated within doctrine how problem characterization is conducted and ultimately produces a clear and concise problem statement.⁵¹ Army doctrine uses the Problem Frame as a separate step within ADM to

⁴⁸ Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 5-0, 2-7.

⁴⁹ JCS, JP 5-0, III-9.

⁵⁰ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner’s Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, VI-5.

⁵¹ JCS, JP 5-0, III-12.

produce a problem statement that is ultimately one of its products and informs detailed planning during MDMP.⁵² Problem characterization, as a planning factor, minimizes its significance in the operational design process and its description is not significantly different from current doctrine.

Stakeholder Development is an attempt to place emphasis on the need for integrated planning between different communities of interest. Organizational cultures, biases, personnel resourcing, politics, and perceptions of time are only a few of the many challenges associated with development of a cohesive and integrated stakeholder relationship. The importance of understanding the desired state by both communities of interest and communities of action requires planners to establish relationships, trust with stakeholders, and integrate them into planning.

The emphasis on stakeholders is a recurring theme throughout the evolved SOF Elements of Operational Design. The SOF/CF/JIIM/SH approach is nothing more than the Indirect and Direct Approach described in Joint Doctrine; the same is true for Nesting End State. The discussion on the integration of stakeholders, interagency, and multinational partners is an application specific to the contemporary and anticipated FOE. The descriptions of these concepts do not represent a unique application by SOF, but rather are relevant to the broader force. The inclusion of stakeholder development and integration into Joint and Army doctrine may negate the need for specific SOF expressions.

Time is always a factor in planning and execution. The Operational Time element of SOF Operational Design goes beyond the consideration of time in terms of a mission variable. Operational Time considers a temporal perspective to the operational approach and addresses the importance of understanding perceptions of time in different cultures. Understanding the potential for change of national will and political support to operations is essential in developing a practical

⁵² Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 5-0, 2-9.

operational approach. This aspect would not be unique to SOF, but relevant to any force operating in an environment short of declared war or major combat operations.

The Collaboration Model describes a unique conceptual tool used to illustrate the relationships with given stakeholders and describes the effort to merge common goals and meet desired end states and effectively achieve unity of effort. The collaboration model goes beyond to the language of integration and depicts accomplishment for communities of interest. Rather than an expression as a unique element of operational design, the collaboration model is a design graphic, which when accompanied with a narrative, develops as part of the operational approach to provide the unit with a clear understanding of the interaction between stakeholders.

The combining of operational design elements such as center of gravity/decisive point and objective/lines of operation and lines of effort in SOF Operational Design appears to be a precarious attempt to shorten and streamline the Elements of Operational Design. By combining elements, planners may begin to think about these elements as one-in-the-same. Center of Gravity is significantly different from Decisive Point and Objective is related to, but completely separate from Lines of Operation and/or Lines of Effort that inform the operational approach. As cognitive tools and planning factors it is important to distinguish between these elements in order for planners to give them the analysis they deserve. SOF Operational Design uses the Joint definition of center of gravity but gives no mention of how decisive point is defined or distinguishable.⁵³ Similarly, SOF Operational Design uses the Joint definition of objective, followed by a paraphrased understanding of lines of effort and it completely omits any understanding of lines of operation, yet combining the two elements.⁵⁴ Apart from emphasizing the importance of stakeholder integration, SOF Operational Design elements that merely combine existing Joint

⁵³ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, VI-6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, VI-8.

elements do not significantly offer any unique expression or give cause to deviate from established doctrine.

Culmination in SOF Operational Design echoes the definition used in Joint and Army doctrine. The unique expression here describes culmination in terms of operations other than offensive and defensive actions relative to major combat. There is valuable understanding in terms of culmination with respect to LOE in support of a campaign and conditions that effect changing end states of stakeholders. There is, however, a blending of concepts to include reframing and anticipation, which are relevant beyond culmination and addressed elsewhere in operational design.

The use of Termination Criteria and Culmination planning factors essentially mirrors that found in the Joint Elements of Operational Design. There is minimal uniqueness in the expression of these elements, apart from stakeholder integration. One significant difference is the purposeful listing of Termination first in the Joint Elements of Operational Design, whereas in SOF Operational Design, Termination Criteria is last. Joint Doctrine states, “Termination criteria are developed first among the elements of operational design as they enable the development of the military end state and objectives.”⁵⁵

The exclusion of the remaining Joint Elements of Operational Design (Effect, Anticipation, Operational Reach, Arranging Operations, Forces, and Functions) limits the effectiveness of SOF Operational Design across the broader continuum of conflict. With respect to operational art, Joint doctrine states, “commanders and staff apply operational art to operational design using the joint operation planning process (JOPP).”⁵⁶ Thus, operational art informs operational design with acknowledgment that the Army’s elements of operational art

⁵⁵ JCS, JP 5-0, III-19.

⁵⁶ Ibid., x.

additionally include basing, tempo, phasing and transitions, and risks.⁵⁷ These cognitive tools provide the SOF commander with mechanisms to think about the synchronization, logistical support, and command and control of operations needed to inform future detailed planning. The cognitive concept of design is not to be overly prescriptive with checklists of considerations, thus planners should not feel constrained to Joint, Army, or SOF design elements. The utility of these lists is simply in their inclusion into the thought processes that ultimately inform the operational approach; not all may be relevant for every situation.

Significant friction exists between the doctrinal and SOF adapted process of developing an operational approach through design. The first step of SOF Operational Design is framing the SOF Operational Environment.⁵⁸ Right away, this methodology departs from interdependence by creating the assumption that there is an operational environment unique to SOF. The SOF operational environment describes a contemporary environment characterized by “varying levels of stability, security, governance, intractability, and problem clarity, [that] demands purposeful collaboration and nesting of stakeholder plans and capabilities to maximize desired conditions for U.S. interests.”⁵⁹ This environment is not unique to SOF; however, SOF Operational Design builds on this as a foundation. The SOF Operational Design flow (figure 4) illustrates elements of design as belonging to particular steps in the process. In the framing of the SOF Operational Environment, culture, problem characterization, and stakeholder development are contained at the beginning of a seemingly linear process, despite reframing feedback loops. The aggregation of problem characterization within this step may detract from the significant emphasis that detailed

⁵⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 5-0, 2-4.

⁵⁸ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner’s Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, VII-1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, VI-5.

planning process such as MDMP and Joint Operational Planning Process place on identifying the problem statement.

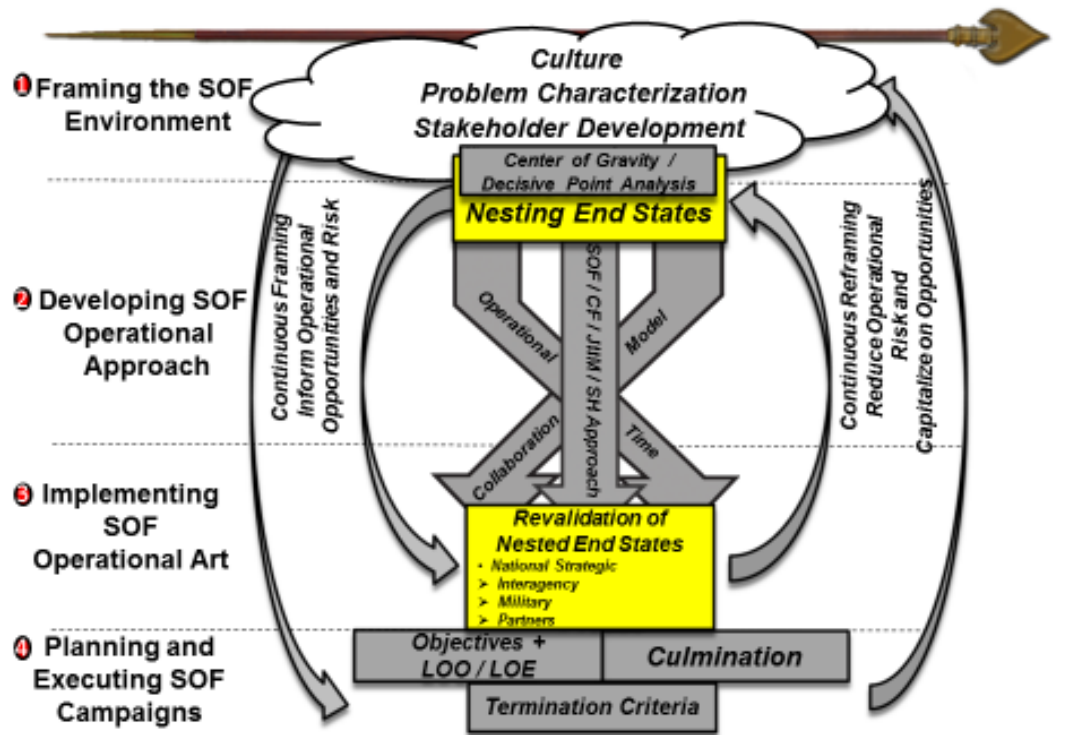


Figure 4. Special Operations Forces Design Flow.

Source: Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, version 1.9 (Fort Bragg, NC: US Army Special Operations Command, 27 August 2013), VI-10.

The second step of SOF Operational Design is Developing SOF Operational Approach. The design flow depicts a linear construct incorporating Center of Gravity and Decisive Point Analysis, Nesting End States, Operational Time, SOF/CF/JIIM/SH Approach, and Collaboration Model. Although feedback loops are illustrated, bounding these cognitive ideas within a conceptual process is limiting. By comparison, the doctrinal illustration of an operational

approach centers on lines of effort or lines of operations and objectives that enter the SOF design flow in the last step.

The third step of SOF Operational Design is SOF Operational Art implementation. SOF Operational Art is “the continuous cognitive approach by commanders and staffs, anchored in the process of critical thinking, to develop strategies that organize/integrate and employ stakeholder capabilities and expertise to Shape, Prevent and Win campaigns for our Nation.”⁶⁰ Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* does not bind operational art within operational design or ADM; rather it is an overarching concept that begins with the Joint definition. The Army adapts the broad joint definition to “the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.”⁶¹ Operational Art provides a framework to apply throughout the planning and execution of operations. Army doctrine acknowledges the Joint operational design elements for use during joint operations. It does however introduce additional Army specific elements, basing, tempo, risks, and phasing and transitions. As cognitive tools, with no prescriptive expectation that all elements will apply specifically to every situation, the application of any element of Joint Operational Design, Army Operational Art, or SOF Operational Design only provides the commander the opportunity to increase understanding and visualization of complex environments and apply combat power effectively.

The fourth step of SOF Operational Design is Planning and Executing SOF Campaigns, followed by continuous reframing, as required. Comparatively in Joint and Army doctrine, this would be a transition step to detailed planning. The SOF Operational Design flow significantly limits itself by waiting until this step to address the elements Objective/Lines of Operations and

⁶⁰ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *USASOC Planner’s Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, VI-4.

⁶¹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 3-0, 4-1.

Lines of Effort, Culmination, and Termination Criteria. The process of reframing addresses risks and opportunities. Placing these elements at the end of the design flow requires immediate reframing in order to incorporate these factors into the operational approach.

The design flow suggested by SOF Operational Design gives the perception of a linear methodology and mechanistic approach to operational design by overlaying cognitive tools within procedural steps. This cannot produce an optimal solution, as these tools are part of an integrated thought process to create shared understanding and inform an operational approach applied to detail planning and execution.

Analysis of Special Operations Phase Zero Operational Art

Army Special Forces Colonel Brian Petit recommends changes to the Joint doctrine Elements of Operational Design in his book, *Going Big by Getting Small: The Application of Operational Art by Special Operations in Phase Zero*. Colonel Petit categorizes his recommendations by those that merit change, modification, or warrant the articulation of SOF expressions. Colonel Petit assesses nine of the thirteen elements of operational design that he feels require unique considerations in regards to SOF, specifically in Phase Zero, Shaping operations.

The suggested changes to doctrine seem to attempt to bridge the cultural grammar divide between military and civilian government personnel. Hard, definitive terms such as termination and end state resonate with uniformed parties. The military has a cultural desire to avoid the perception of an occupying force and the visualization of achievement increases morale. Civilian government agencies thrive on persistent involvement in foreign affairs; long after military intervention, civil agencies will remain involved. Civil agencies do not think in terms of termination or end state. Operational planning which uses this verbiage is off-putting and obstacle forming to integrative planning. In order to navigate the cultural grammar, Petit suggests that termination changes to transition and end state changes to a position of continuing advantage.

Because of the increasing importance in interagency cooperation and integration, there is real value in understanding these narrative preferences. Although doctrinal revision is not necessary, it is worth the inclusion of differing cultural narratives when integrating interagency partners.

The idea of developing campaigns, operational approaches, or strategies without an end state or desired conditions is an idea brought forth by Everett Carl Dolman in *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age*. Dolman pursues the idea that strategy is a continuous endeavor and like time or matter, never ends or is fully destroyed; rather, it changes or evolves throughout time. Logically, this makes sense at the national strategic level, but at the operational level and below, soldiers need to be able to define success and be able to visualize returning home with honor. The disparity between these terms is one that only requires situational understanding to the stakeholders involved and effective, pragmatic communication skills.

The modification of terminology, such as changing center of gravity to right partner, right place, right time, begins to get at the advisory and special warfare aspects prevalent within shaping operations. Center of gravity is an analogy used by Carl von Clausewitz to describe the center of power from upon which the adversary relies the most.⁶² In shaping operations where relationships and trust matter most, the concept of right partner, right place, right time is decisive. As a cognitive tool for understanding, center of gravity remains a relevant means of analysis throughout the joint phasing model. Incorporating the concept of right partner, right place, right time into a SOF Operational Design handbook provides a unique consideration for special operations.

Petit considered other elements to have unique SOF expressions rather than unique terminology. Expressing decisive points as decisive relationships, direct and indirect approaches in terms of special warfare and surgical strike, anticipation in terms of programs and assessments,

⁶² Clausewitz, 703.

operational reach in terms of access and location, and arranging operations as an arranging chain all offer SOF an opportunity to describe different cognitive approaches to campaigning. Just as the title suggests, the recommendations provide an expression of the application of these cognitive tools, by SOF, in environments short of war. With the focus of analysis on phase zero, the recommendations are not significant enough to warrant a change to Joint or Army doctrine. However, future revisions of the *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design*, nesting it with Joint doctrine, would also benefit from the articulation of SOF expressions detailed in Petit's book.

Application of Operational Design in the Global SOF Network

In order to examine the applicability of the current operational design process, it is useful to examine a recent and ongoing SOF campaign. Viewing the development of the operational approach through the lens of current operational design methodologies, opportunities for the implementation of SOF Operational Design may appear. The case study of USSOCOM's Global SOF Network (GSN) offers an example of a strategic level effort by SOF to provide options to national leaders through ends, ways, and means nested in both Joint doctrine and DOD processes.

In the May 2013 *United States Special Operations Command Special Operations Forces Operating Concept*, USSOCOM introduced a global SOF campaign plan known as GSN 2020. The GSN is "a globally linked force of SOF and their strategic partners – joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational, non-governmental, commercial, and academic."⁶³ The plan

⁶³ US Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command Special Operations Forces Operating Concept*, Fortuna's Corner, May 2013, accessed 4 March 2014, <http://fortunascorner.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/final-low-res-sof-operating-concept-may-2013.pdf>, 3.

meets the Joint definition of a campaign and provides a single overarching plan, inclusive of mission-specific plans, briefed to the Secretary of Defense.⁶⁴

The *Global SOF Network 2020 Campaign Plan* follows the Joint Operational Design methodology, but does not strictly follow the definitions of the elements of operational design. Interpretation of the elements of operational design as conceptual tools supports a global and long duration effort. The plan suggests a gap in the *Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan* as it relates to SOF and steady state activities in support of GCCs.

First, to understand the strategic direction, GSN 2020 begins with a review of national strategy documents and legislative authorities. The *United States Special Operations Command Special Operations Forces Operating Concept* references the *Defense Strategic Guidance*, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, and Title 10 US Code Sections 164 and 167. As a Joint headquarters and functional combatant command, establishing the operational linkage to strategic policy and vision gives credibility to the design concept.

Second, to understand the operational environment, GSN 2020 offers a broad picture of an evolving unpredictable current state, characterized by: increased role of non-state actors, demographic shifts, redistribution and diffusion of global power, globalization, advanced technologies and robotics, and enduring conflict.⁶⁵ These challenges will require the right kind of investments in long-term strategy to provide GCCs with agile and responsive forces.⁶⁶ The vision

⁶⁴ US Special Operations Command, *The Global SOF Network Campaign Plan Fact Sheet* (MacDill AFB, FL: US Special Operations Command, April 2013), 4.

⁶⁵ US Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command Special Operations Forces Operating Concept*, 2.

⁶⁶ Headquarters, United States Special Operations Command, *SOCOM 2020* (MacDill AFB, FL: US Special Operations Command, 2013), accessed 1 February 2014. <http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/SOCOM2020Strategy.pdf>, 3.

for the future state is the desired conditions of a globally networked force and it highlights the enhanced capability of the SOF operator.⁶⁷

Third, a narrative on obstacles that impede achievement of the vision defines the problem. Unity of effort and purpose, improved integration, and collaboration and cooperation represent those intangibles that bring focus to the human domain and the necessity of relationship and trust building. The problem statement, although not labeled as such, provides a framework for the operational approach that links effects to objectives, which can be associated with lines of operation or lines of effort.

Fourth and finally, the *Global SOF Network 2020 Campaign Plan* develops into an operational approach with six lines of effort, each with supporting objectives:

- Transform USSOCOM into a Functional Command with global responsibilities
- Provide GCCs improved SOF capacity
- Gain more flexible authorities
- Build Regional SOF Coordination Centers (RSCCs)
- Strengthen Interagency Relationships
- Expand the Mission Network for SOF⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Headquarters, United States Special Operations Command, *SOCOM 2020*, 8.

⁶⁸ US Special Operations Command, *The Global SOF Network Campaign Plan Fact Sheet*.

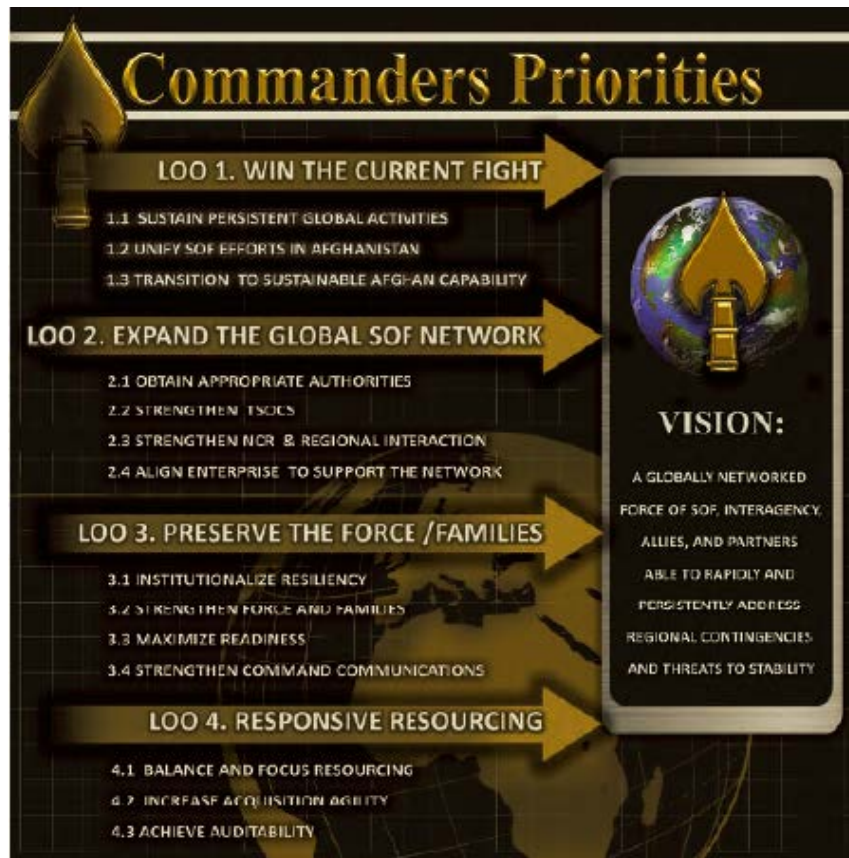


Figure 5. USSOCOM Commander's Priorities.

Source: Headquarters, United States Special Operations Command, *SOCOM 2020* (MacDill AFB, FL: US Special Operations Command, 2013), accessed 1 February 2014, <http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/SOCOM2020Strategy.pdf>, 7.

The open-source information on the *Global SOF Network 2020 Campaign Plan* is purposefully narrative-based, leaving very little to interpretation, which supports its dissemination to the broad community of interest and community of action.

Although not explicitly articulated, the *Global SOF Network 2020 Campaign Plan* centers on stakeholder development and achieving unity of effort and purpose. By incorporating various partners both domestic and international, USSOCOM seeks to leverage a wide base of knowledge capabilities. This approach allows USSOCOM to maximize output and effectiveness, while conserving human capital.

From the broader USSOCOM strategy document, *SOCOM 2020*, to the *Global SOF Network 2020 Campaign Plan*, the narrative follows the Joint Operational Design process. The unique design flow offered by USASOC's SOF Operational Design associates the problem definition with the operational environment, breaking that direct relation between the solution and the distinct and separate articulation of obstacles. Using the unique SOF Operational Design flow, the next step would be the implementation of SOF Operational Art, followed by planning and executing SOF campaigns. The utility of a campaign plan like GSN 2020 is in the broad conceptual focus that enables subordinates to build detailed plans that support the commander's vision.

GSN 2020 does not mention termination or termination criteria, but rather emphasizes enduring engagement that builds trust and supports the interests of the United States and partners. Even a modification to transition would not apply here, because this campaign accomplishes objectives by leveraging relationships. Relationships require maintenance and persistent engagement. Termination criteria undercut any foundation designed to build trust. As a campaign, GSN 2020 uses an eight-year model, but conceptually the initiative is perpetual.

Similarly, military end-state requires a certain amount of adaptation to fit into a global SOF effort. Given the importance of integration with interagency and partner nations who do not operate with an end to operations in mind, military end-state is more likely understood as Petit borrowed from strategist Carl Dolman as a, "position of continuing advantage."⁶⁹ USASOC's translation of nesting end states specifically, articulates the incorporation of national, interagency, military, and partner desired outcomes. In an environment characterized by significant integration and interdependence of the civilian interagency communities, the demilitarizing of doctrinal language assists with presenting a less threatening, unobjectionable approach. In order to be more

⁶⁹ Brian S. Petit, *Going Big By Getting Small: The Application of Operational Art By Special Operations In Phase Zero*, (Outskirts Press, 2013), 142.

concise and comprehensive, desired state provides a reasonable alternative to military end-state. The GSN 2020 campaign plan expresses the desired state in terms of the commander's vision: "A globally networked force of SOF, interagency, allies, and partners able to rapidly and persistently address regional contingencies and threats to stability."⁷⁰

The *Global SOF Network 2020 Campaign Plan* strives to expand USSOCOM's operational reach through the development of relationships leveraged in times of crisis. Operationalizing the US internal bases of support promotes clearer communication and better understanding. Building SOF capacity within partner nations may avert potential crises through more rapid interdiction. Internally to the DOD, USSOCOM assumed operational control of the GCC Theater Special Operations Commands in 2013, which allow the command to more effectively resource and pursue a global campaign.

Conclusion

The study began with the initiative by leaders within SOF to energize the importance of operational design relative to SOF campaigning. Agreeably, there is a gap between Joint doctrine and the specific articulation of conceptual planning considerations related to Phase Zero, Shaping operations. Although some may disagree, the description of a unique SOF operational environment and planning considerations do not validate the need for a doctrine or handbook that departs from established methodologies. The *USASOC's Planners Handbook for SOF Operational Design* offers a different approach to operational design, but does not represent an evolution specific to special operations. There is, however, excellent value in publishing a SOF planner's handbook for Operational Design that nests with the methodology found in Joint doctrine. The unique approach in design flow and modification to the elements of operational design does not sufficiently establish the need for a deviation from Joint or Army design doctrine.

⁷⁰ Headquarters, United States Special Operations Command, *SOCOM 2020*, 7.

The dialogue that this approach offers should add to an overall improvement to both Joint and ADM through the integration of language and conceptual ideas relevant to the broader force. An operational design handbook specific to SOF planners should articulate functionally specific expressions of operational design unique to limited war or operations short-of-war. Planners within the SOF community should be comfortable flowing between Joint and Army design doctrine in the development of operational approaches. Future development of a handbook on SOF Operational Design should provide specific considerations unique to special operations across the spectrum of conflict.

USASOC represents a node from which to provide input into emerging and future doctrine. As a service component designed for operations short of war and the proponent for unconventional warfare, USASOC is uniquely equipped to assist in the modernization of doctrine relevant to increased emphasis on pre-intervention activities, otherwise known as left of bang. Special operations play a significant role in the Army's core competencies and USASOC must integrate special warfare theories into the broader Army as a whole. The special operations communities of interest and communities of action must identify and improve upon lessons learned over the last decade-and-a-half, and apply them to future operations. Suggestions to evolutions of doctrine or descriptions of unique application must be clear, articulate, and actionable.

The value of a USASOC handbook on operational design is in relating the application of Joint and Army doctrine to SOF specific campaigns or operational plans. In a period of increasing fiscal constraints and limited political will for large-scale military operations, SOF must enhance the capability to design and execute special warfare campaigns. Small-scale, long duration, indirect approaches that maximize indigenous resources and draw on non-military elements of national power to overcome the lack of relative force strength characterize these campaigns.

Recommendations

Future developments of a USASOC planner's handbook for SOF Operational Design should nest with the methodology and terms found in Joint and Army doctrine. Although relevant discourse challenges the classical versus systems approach to warfare, design-like thinking is currently a part of integrated planning and is relevant at all levels of war and across the spectrum of conflict.

Colonel Brian Petit's analysis, in his book *Going Big by Getting Small*, provides an opportunity for USASOC to articulate unique expressions of operational design and other cognitive tools that will enhance understanding. Of the nine elements of operational design assessed by Colonel Petit, five suggest unique SOF expressions and two offer modifications. Termination and Military End-state should include a narrative on overcoming organizational differences in expectations. Demilitarizing the verbiage in Joint doctrine supports efforts for better communication with interagency communities. For example, Desired State, rather than Military End-state, is a less threatening terminology to civilian organizations. This change in terminology would not reduce the military planner's understanding.

Stakeholder development is a reoccurring theme throughout the USASOC handbook. It is clear that, just as Joint integration is essential, leveraging intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organization, multinational corporations, allied and partner nations, academia, and others found within the GSN have become critical to gaining better situational understanding and battlefield effectiveness. Integrating the emphasis placed on stakeholder development into Joint and Army doctrine will provide greater shared understanding and goal convergence, and thus unity of effort in major operations.

Implications

As the operating environment evolves, so too should doctrine. Often military doctrine is slow to shift to the changing environment, optimized for past conflicts. The *USASOC Planner's*

Handbook for SOF Operational Design deviates from doctrine due to the perception that current approaches optimize for Phase III, Dominate, or major combat operations. This perception stems primarily from a lack of deep understanding of doctrine. Understanding occurs through focused study, reflection, and practical application. Doctrine provides a foundational understanding of concepts and applications. Effective leaders can deviate or infer understanding from doctrinal narratives if they have a solid understanding of the principles. Education of operational design and design-like thinking should begin earlier in professional military education. In the Army, ADM is part of integrated planning, and doctrine discusses how it informs the detailed planning of MDMP and execution of Troop Leading Procedures. Company grade officers are primarily educated in planning and executing detailed operations. Conceptual planning at the operational and strategic levels occurs at the field grade and higher levels. Although the development of campaigns and conceptual plans are primarily the responsibility of field grade planners, senior company grade officers and senior noncommissioned officers working in brigade and above headquarters should have a basic familiarity with the definitions and process of design.

Increased emphasis on campaign planning and the application of operational design within USASOC has sparked initiatives toward developing a cadre of SOF operational planners. U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School has implemented a course on Special Warfare Operational Design which is designed to enhance the planning capability of SOF personnel to “develop and/or assist in the development of theater-level UW campaign designs and plans for theater special operations commands and theater commands.”⁷¹ This course targets company grade officers and senior noncommissioned officers, as well as field grade officers and warrant officers. Most SOF officers develop a basic understanding of design-like thinking and

⁷¹ US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, *FY 2015 Academic Handbook*, US Army Special Operations Command, accessed 11 October 2014, http://www.soc.mil/swcs/_pdf/FY15_AcademicHandbook.pdf, 37.

operational design during Intermediate Level Education at the US Army Command and General Staff College or Naval Postgraduate School. Additionally, SOF officers can elect to attend the Special Operations Campaign Artist Program after the US Army Command and General Staff College. The US Army's comprehensive course on operational design, however, remains at the School of Advanced Military Studies. USASOC initiatives integrate SOF specific course material through the Special Operations Operational Art Module for SOF officers assigned to USASOC. Future operational design education may benefit from leveraging the experiences and methods found within academic institutions such as Stanford University's Design School, or corporations such as Google, known for their innovative thinking and approaches to unique problem-sets.

Special operations campaigning requires a strategy for actions short of war. Strategic guidance available to shape campaigns short of war will most likely be vague and non-directive. Planners must integrate various strategic guidance documents, interagency visions and approach statements, the GCC's Theater Campaign Plan and integrate steady state Theater Security Cooperation Programs.

Planners within the SOF community will benefit from a revised USASOC planner's handbook nested with Joint doctrine and accepted within the Army's institutional training commands. Over the last decade, the Army has recognized a need for increased SOF/CF interdependence. A USASOC planner's handbook for operational design communicates both internally and externally the unique environmental interpretations and operational expressions of doctrine by SOF. As future revisions to doctrine are made, the integration of concepts and procedures found within different service and intra-service organizations will enable the Joint Force to be more effective, faster, by reducing the interoperability learning curve.

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